

Eating Your Way to Happiness

Can blueberries beat the

Monday blues? Research shows that what you eat can significantly affect your mood. For breakfast, try oatmeal or eggs. Both contain an amino acid that helps boost the levels of serotonin, a neurotransmitter that makes you feel good. As for the blueberries, save those for lunch. The antioxidants in them will ward off workday stress. Finish with a small piece of chocolate. The compounds in it will lift your mood, while a natural stimulant gives you a small energy kick. For dinner, boost your serotonin again with a piece of salmon. Add a side of spinach to increase folate levels and help beat depression. Try healthy snacks in between meals when you become irritable or unfocused. This will keep blood sugar levels steady and prevent you from crashing during the day.



Source: <http://whfoods.org>

Internal Customers Count

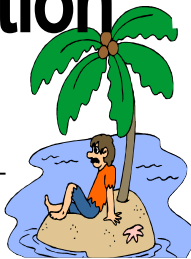
Think you don't interact with customers?

Think again. Are there co-workers, work units or departments that suffer if you do not provide correct information? What about missed deadlines? If you put a caller from another office on hold or if you don't complete or follow-through on a project, will the productivity of that person's work unit be affected? Others in your agency who depend on you for information or services to do their jobs are customers – internal customers. Considering your co-workers as customers will promote internal harmony and reap benefits for your agency.



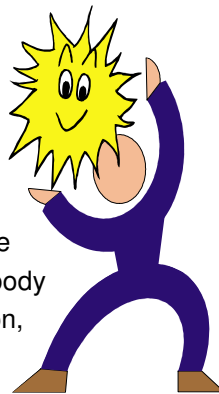
Overcoming Alienation

Are you feeling detached, with fewer quality relationships, because of a fast-paced, overworked life-style that never seems to let you take a breath? Are the neighbors next door still strangers? This phenomenon is called "alienation." The concept of alienation is not new, but it's getting more attention from sociologists because more people are complaining about it. Before the years slip by, take steps to intervene. First, rein in your media and Internet consumption. One presents a false reality and the other consumes time. Decrease isolating activities and increase face-to-face interactions. Once you "get out there" you'll want to stay there.



Seeking Happiness Is Preventive

A recent study found that survey participants who reported being happy all or most of the time were 1.5 times more likely to report good health. Seeking happiness is a preventive healthcare strategy. Awareness of your mind-body link can help prevent issues such as depression, anger, and stress from compounding into greater problems. If you just haven't felt like yourself lately, don't hesitate to visit your Employee Assistance Program for guidance and resources. There's no shame in feeling down. Happiness is a work in progress.



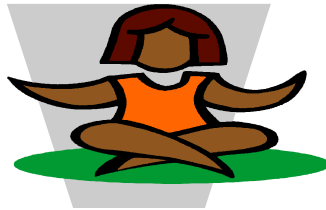
Source: American Journal of Health Promotion, Sept/Oct 2008

Home Stretch to Higher Grades



Four months down, five to go. Is your child on track for a successful school year? If not, don't panic – there's plenty of time to stage a New Year comeback. Your job is to provide coaching, encouragement, and some discipline. Schoolwork can turn into meaningless drudgery when it's not connected to real-world outcomes, so tune in to your child's emotional triggers and find areas of interest that you can use as leverage. Defeat discouragement by breaking up the remainder of the year into manageable, short-term goals that build to your year-end goal. Demonstrate the usefulness of schoolwork by showing how skills learned in school apply to your child's hobbies or career interests. Help your child to recognize opportunity within adversity. Build good work habits by carving out scheduled study time in 30-minute blocks with a 10-minute break between blocks. Staying on top of daily workloads will help your child avoid the stress of last-minute cramming. Make sure your child has a designated work area that's free of distractions such as television and cell phones. Use a planner to prioritize daily assignments. If materials have a way of getting lost, spend an evening developing a good system for filing and organizing class work. Step in if your child is spending too much time on social Web sites.

Exercise Mind Over Matter



Don't let your New Year's fitness resolution succumb to waning enthusiasm. Staying power is mental, so get your game plan together with these five tips to maintain your drive: 1) View workouts as time for yourself, rather than as a chore. On days when you're unmotivated, promise to do just five minutes of exercise. After getting started, you'll probably do much more. 2) Whether it's pounds or performance, set yourself up for morale-building victories by establishing short-term goals and rewarding yourself after achieving each one. 3) Vary your workouts occasionally by trying different exercises. 4) Bring your ultimate goal to life through visualization. Imagine how you'll feel slipping into a new dress or walking confidently in a swimsuit along a beach. 5) Take pictures along the way to document your progress. This is a powerful strategy not to let go of your goal.

Keeping Your Brain Fit As You Grow



Your brain, like your body, loses pliability, quickness, and stamina with age. Keeping mentally fit isn't much different from staying in shape – it's really just about lifestyle. If you already work out regularly, congratulations – 25 percent of the blood pumping through your body is delivering performance-enhancing oxygen to your brain as you exercise. Your diet is also important. Start by cutting the fat. Cholesterol buildup can reduce the oxygen supply to your brain by almost 20 percent over time. Load up on foods rich in antioxidants, such as strawberries or red beans, to nurture brain cell health. Add fish to reduce age-related brain inflammation, increase memory, and help your brain send and receive messages efficiently. Consume leafy green veggies rich in folate to enhance brain processing. Leafy greens may also play a role in preventing Alzheimer's. Finally, shape up underused areas of your brain by "cross training" your mind with new and different mental challenges.

First Responders: Say, "Yes" to CISD



Emergency first responders know the risk for psychological trauma from exposure to intense life-and-death events. Many Washington State employees also face situations daily that present the potential for a critical incident. If you are faced with such an incident, don't pass up the opportunity to participate in a critical-incident stress debriefing (CISD) when offered after such an event. You may think "I don't need it," but participate anyway. The beneficial effects of CISDs on mental health have been well documented. They can prevent lasting consequences on your health and even disturbances in relationships with family members and other loved ones. Thinking you don't need CISDs because you're "used to" trauma means you may be unaware of the damaging effects of "horrible knowledge" on your brain. Let the occurrence of the traumatic event itself be the criterion for saying, "Yes, I'll go." Most EA Professionals are specially trained in critical incident management and qualified to conduct CISD's when needed.

Happy New Year from your Washington State Employee Assistance Program!